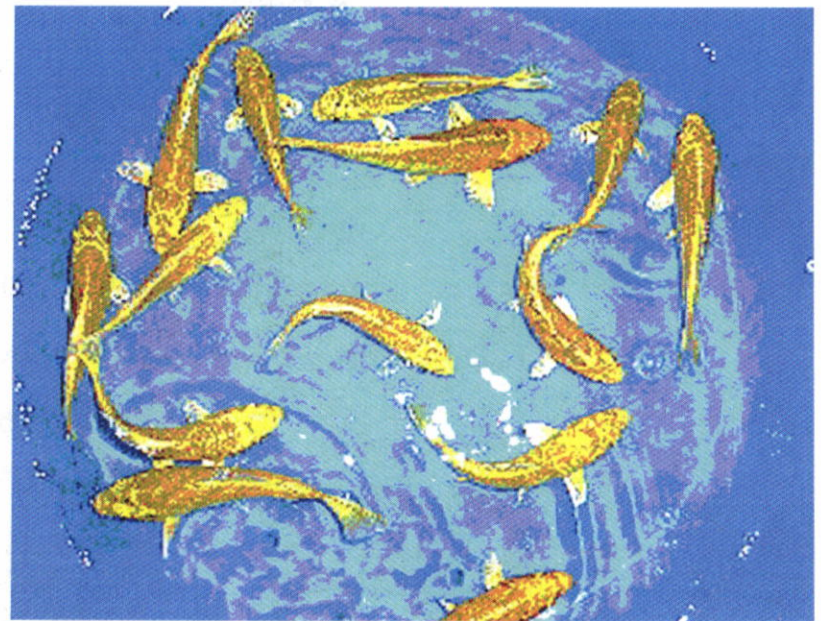


free!

# **BUILD** THOSE **COLLECTIVES**

**HOW TO BUILD A COLLECTIVE  
AND WHAT TO DO WITH IT WHEN IT'S BUILT**

version 1.0



**MOOSE AND INZA**

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*simple truths series*

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Forming a collective can at first seem like a daunting task, given the nature of the political climate in your area, or considering your own isolation, relationship with other activists, or merely the fact that you don't know what a collective is. Worry not, for there are a number of ways to begin the process of getting a collective organized and organizing. Don't be discouraged by the amount of time it takes to get things rolling. Forming a collective should be a natural process that offers participants a valuable and positive social experience, rather than a hurried project with an attitude that things have to get done right away, or that there is no time and the revolution is right around the corner! Remember, take your time and treat the process with respect and patience. And have fun.

## I. WHAT IS A COLLECTIVE?

A collective is a group of individuals, ranging from between 2 and 20 (and sometimes larger), who share a particular interest or political outlook, and are working together on a long term basis. They may not have the extreme trust and intimacy of an affinity group, although it would be highly advantageous if they did. It's be important to note that "organization" is a loose term that can be used to describe a collective. However, a collective is unique in that all participants strive to share power equally and have a higher level of respect for hearing all voices, a condition usually not present in a top down organization. As Brian Dominic states:

*"When a group of people comes face to face to organize in their own interest, and not in the purported interest of others, and to take actions which do not impose upon others, they are acting collectively. A collective is a social organization in which all actors are on even ground, in which all participate equitably, and in which all members are seen as vital elements of group unity and successful function. A collective is a more or less organic unit. It is not a collection of individuals who see their own interests as more important than those of the other members. Collectives serve their members by including them all. When you are a member of a well-functioning collective, you know that your interests are the interests of the collective. It is not something which is outside of you; it is an entity of which you are an integral and valued part. Your collective is yours. Collective members are autonomous managers. They run their own lives."*

See: <http://www.anarconyc.net/organizers/organizers1.html>

Collectives are sometimes not actually called collectives, however it's easy to make the distinction once the functioning and cohesion of the group becomes transparent and egalitarian. Some collectives have organizational principles or principles of unity; some do not. Some collectives strive to be conscious of leadership roles, some merely pay lip service to these issues. Collectives begin many ways; some collectives are working groups that have broken off from other collectives, some may develop out of affinity groups that decide to take on more long term projects, and some are created by a few individuals with just an idea.

See: [http://www.radio4all.org/ala/dec\\_collective.html](http://www.radio4all.org/ala/dec_collective.html)



3. Creating Revolutionary Culture: The authoritarian ruling class survives not mainly through its repressive force, but through the acceptance of hierarchal, racist, sexist, dog-eat-dog culture. The revolution must break this grip over how we live as much as overthrow the structures that hold us down. We need to create music, art, community, life that inspires the kind of world we are fighting for.

4. Counter-Institutions: Counter-Institutions show in the here and now the benefits and the challenges of collective control over resources, services, and structures. Counter-Institutions can highlight needs that the state does not fulfill and provide a base of operations for the anarchist movement.

5. Developing Skills: We should consciously create an environment where we can share and develop the necessary skills for the tasks ahead: critical thinking and public speaking, child-care and emergency first aid, agit-prop and self-defense, etc., etc., etc.

6. Making Links: Crucial to any revolutionary project is the expansion of ideas and debates, mutual aid and solidarity, coordination of organizing and attack. We should actively look to make contacts and/or alliances with other groups and individuals with similar goals across Chicago, our region, North America, and the world.

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From: <http://slash.autonomedia.org/analysis/02/09/08/1640235.shtml>

## II. WHY FORM A COLLECTIVE?

There are many reasons why one would choose to form a collective, or to formalize, into a collective, a group already in existence. Collaborating on common projects for maximum impact, sharing valuable skills among each other, or simple having a place to reflect your grandios ideas are all valid reasons, as are others. Below we list the various "types" of collectives. Please note that many categories below cross over as they would so in reality.

1. **Topical cohesion.** Examples could include:
  - Media collective
  - Legal collective
  - Newspaper publishing
2. **Ideological similarities.** Examples could include:
  - Anarcha-feminist
  - Communist reading group
  - Autonomous-marxist action collective
3. **Issue / goal oriented.** Examples could include:
  - Stop a toxic dump
  - Open a free school collective
  - End the Iraq war collective
4. **Identity.** Examples could include:
  - Queer support collective
  - Womyn of color group
  - Vegan cooking collective (like food not bombs)
5. **General (whatever comes around).** Examples could include:
  - Forming a collective in order to exchange and share valuable skills.
  - Non-sectarian, "only radicals for miles" collective
  - just for the hell of it collective!

## III. WAYS TO FORM A COLLECTIVE

Actually forming the collective can be easy or difficult depending on many factors. Here is a list of ways you could begin the process of forming your collective.

### ORGANIZING THE COLLECTIVE FROM SCRATCH.

#### 1. Announce it

- Make an announcement at a meeting or a forum, or on a local listserve or internet discussion board, about your desire to start a collective.

- Put up a few flyers in your neighborhood announcing a meeting, with contact information, and time and place. If you would like your collective to be community based, obviously focus on the community locations that offer access, like laundromats, public libraries, bookstores, cafes, barber shops, apartment stoops, community centers, and other spaces where people hang out doing politics and such. Don't forget to utilize your local lefty bookstore or infoshop.
- When announcing the formation of a collective, be specific regarding what exactly you would like to do. It's much more advantageous to decide ahead of time what you would like to focus on, as being overly general may find you involved with people that have radically different politics, as well as ideas about what "to do".
- A reading or study group is one excellent way of beginning the process of collective formation. What better way to get together and come to know those who may have similar political or personal affinities.

## 2. Agenda

- Have the first meeting "open space" style, meaning, no rigid agenda or structure. Try to make it a safe space for people to talk, discuss, and debate ideas and politics.
- Organize an agenda for the second meeting, based on the first meeting's flavor. Were people ready to get down to concrete work? Are they committed to a particular project?
- At the second meeting, propose a set of "principle of unity", or "principles of cohesion". Come up with criteria for participation in the collective.
- Invite a member of an established collective to your second meeting. Ask them about particular problems that faced or still grapple with, and how they have solved these problems. Put these ideas on the agenda to discuss or debate. Take time "feeling out" people as to what they are looking for in a collective. Meet at a park, bar or cafe (on neutral ground), and informally, to have your initial discussions.

## DIVIDING FROM OTHER GROUPS.

### 1. Working Group Collective

Working groups or sub-committees of existing organizations (like the myriad of anti-war coalitions that developed right after the attacks on Iraq) are excellent ways in which to form collectives. Sometimes the participants in these working groups find that they have much in common with co-participants, and working closely with others on specific tasks is a great way to develop affinities that can easily translate to a collective. One example is a legal working group that formed within an anti-globalization group, and eventually became its own legal collective that outlasted the original network!

### 2. "Stand and Announce"

Sometimes merely standing up at a large coalition meeting and announcing the formation of a collective (and passing around a sign up sheet) is a good way to find others who may be interested in being in a collective. Caucuses

understand. Here and now, we grasp a world of wonder and joy that is a powerful weapon for destroying the world of domination.

From: [http://www.geocities.com/kk\\_abacus/vb/wd12tw.html](http://www.geocities.com/kk_abacus/vb/wd12tw.html)

## BUILDING REVOLUTIONARY NUCLEI

by Federation of Revolutionary Anarchist Collectives (Great Lakes Region)

What is the best way to organize for revolution? How do we start to take on the system of patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism, and the state? In what way will our efforts pre-figure the free society we are fighting for, defend autonomy and self-organization from authoritarian repression and new elites?

Nuclei is a fancy word that means seeds, kernels, cells, "the head of the comet", "a central point, group, or mass about which gathering, concentration, or gradual build-up takes place". Revolutionary Nuclei means a core group that is trying to learn, expand, develop, prepare opportunities in which we can help bring the struggle for total freedom and equality to higher and deeper levels; ultimately an uprising or "insurrection" that joins into an international anti-authoritarian Social Revolution.

A true Revolutionary Nuclei, would be our anarchist collective, but it would also be more than that: The scenes in which we operate, the struggles that we join, the projects that we create, the skills we develop, the music that keeps us moving, the elders that we learn from and the youth who we try and keep up with.

Revolutionary Nuclei is not Leninist Vanguardism. We don't claim any automatic access to "the truth" and we deny anyone the right to permanent "lead" over the struggle or society. Our goals are also opposed. We do not seek to capture power for our organization but instead to use organization as an effective contribution to the fight against all exploitation and oppression. We move amongst the people not as "leaders", but as equals.

These are some specific elements of a strategy for building Revolutionary Nuclei:

1. A Pole in the Movement. There is a new movement on the streets of North America in the wake of the battle of Seattle. It is large, but inexperienced. It has many anarchist aspects including direct democracy, direct action, and "anti-capitalism", yet it is still dominated by social democrats (left/liberals). We need to be a clear pole within the street protest movements arguing for and developing effective anarchist politics and tactics.

2. A Base in the Class: The revolution will be made by the masses of working class and oppressed people or it will not be made at all. Organizing projects within the working class -- especially communities of color, women, and queers -- help break isolation of radicals, cut against elitist attitudes and help lay the basis for the mass organizations with the only social power capable of revolution.



Since the development of relationships of affinity is itself a reflection of our aims as anarchists and since it is intended to create a deep and ever-expanding knowledge of one another, it cannot simply be left to chance. We need to intentionally create the opportunity for encounters, discussions and debates in which our ideas, aspirations and visions of the revolutionary struggle can come into contention, where real affinities and real conflicts can come out and be developed ... not with the aim of finding a unifying middle ground in which every one is equally compromised, but to clarify distinctions and so discover a real basis for creating projects of action that aren't simply playing the role of radical, activist or militant, but that are real reflections of the desires, passions and ideas of those involved. While publications, internet discussion boards and correspondence can provide means for doing this on some levels, to the extent to which they are open forums they tend to be too random, with potential for the discussion to lose any projectuality and get sidetracked into the democratic exchange of opinions which have little connection to one's life. To my mind, the best and most significant discussions can take place in face-to-face encounters between people with some clarity of why they are coming together to discuss. Thus, organizing discussion groups, conferences, meetings and the like is an integral part of the development of relations of affinity and so of projects of action.

The necessity to pursue the development of relationships of affinity with intention does not mean the development of a formal basis for affinity. It seems to me that formality undermines the possibility of affinity, because it is by nature based on a predetermined, and therefore arbitrary, commonality. Formal organization is based upon an ideological or programmatic unity that ultimately comes down to adherence to the organization as such. Differences must be swept aside for the cause of the organization, and when differences are swept aside, so also are dreams, desires, aspirations and passions since these can only ever belong to the individual. But, in fact, formal organization has nothing to do with intention or projectuality. In fact, by providing an ideology to adhere to it relieves the individual of the responsibility of thinking for herself and developing his own understanding of the world and of her struggle in it. In providing a program, it relieves the individual of the necessity of acting autonomously and making practical analyses of the real conditions in which she is struggling. So, in fact, formality undermines projectuality and the capacity for self-organization and so undermines the aim of anarchist struggle.

Relationships of affinity are the necessary basis of self-organization on the most basic daily level of struggle and of life. It is the deep and growing knowledge of one another that provides the basis for developing projects of revolt that truly reflect our own aspirations and dreams, for developing a shared struggle that is based in the recognition and, at its best, the passionate enjoyment of our very real and beautiful differences. The development of social revolution will, of course, require an organizing of activity beyond the range of our relationships of affinity, but it is the projects that we develop from these relationships that give us the capacity for self-organization, the strength to refuse all formality and, thus, all of the groups that claim to represent the struggle, whether they call themselves parties, unions or federations. In the relationship of affinity, a new way of relating free from all roles and every hackneyed social relationship already begins to develop, and with it an apparent unpredictability that the authorities will never

for instance (like a womyn's caucus) are great opportunities to start the process of forming a collective.

### 3. Divide from an existing collective

Sometimes a collective, because it has gotten too large to function smoothly, or because of personal or political reasons, breaks apart at the seams. Don't look at this division as necessarily a bad thing. Use it as an opportunity to divide and grow. Be honest about the differences members may have. Suggest a division, but with close collaboration (consider networking. It only takes two collectives!). Be honest and identify the reasons for a possible division, and utilize this knowledge to form another group.

### 4. Change your Affinity Group into a collective

There are times when affinity groups, usually organized around actions and protest events, decide to carry on their affiliation after the event or demonstration that originally brought them together. Affinity Groups offer the cohesion and relationships that are great for longer term organizing work.

## IV. HOW TO "RUN" A COLLECTIVE

Actually doing work within the collective can be as difficult as forming the thing in the first place. People tend to have differing, sometimes conflicting opinions about what exactly the collective should do, and how to carry out these tasks. Below we'll try to offer some suggestion about how to "do" the inner process of the organization of work that the collective will undertake.

### 1. Basic process.

How your collective makes its decisions and carries out its tasks is, of course, entirely up to the collective and the collective alone. Generally speaking, all members of the collective should have equal say and power over all decisions and tasks that the collective makes. Usually, but not always, this is done by utilizing "consensus".

- Any decisions that the collective makes should be as close to unanimous as possible. In order to do this, whatever proposals are made should be acceptable to all the members.
  - Take the time to discuss and debate proposals so that they meet with the approval of all the members. List concerns and disagreements. Find ways to resolve these differences.
  - Be generous and don't be afraid to compromise on minor points.
  - Put yourself in other members shoes and try to understand why they would be against the particular action, event, or project.
- For info on consensus and other structure concerns:  
<http://www.consensus.net/vocac2.html>

### 2. Structure: Formal vs. Informal.

The actual meeting to meeting structure of the collective can have a great deal of impact on not only what kind of work gets done, but who does the work, how it gets done, and the feelings people will have during and after the projects are completed. Participatory and egalitarian, yet accountable



structures require a diligent attention to tendencies of oppressions, such as sexism, that will effect the work you do.

Usually small collectives (a handful of people, say 2 to 8) are required to have pretty informal structures, depending on the cohesion of the members. In this case, consensus (unanimity, or unanimity minus one, two, whatever) will suffice. But sometimes collectives grow large enough that they need more formal structures in place to function well (beyond the simple small group process that a cadre of friends usually use). Don't hesitate to acknowledge the changing nature of the collective (like its growth) and the need for more formal structural changes to reflect this. Is there a need for a coordinating or organizing committee (accountable to the larger body, of course)? Working Groups dedicated to particular tasks? Be sure that whatever structure is decided upon there are means to hold all decisions accountable and ultimately agreed to by the entire group, not just a small cadre of active members that sit on sub-groups.

For more on structure, see here:

[http://www.pgaconference.org/\\_postconference/\\_fo\\_tyannyoftyranny.htm](http://www.pgaconference.org/_postconference/_fo_tyannyoftyranny.htm)

### 3. Size: How big is too big?

The question of how big is too big is one that may pop up when the collective reaches a certain size. This is entirely a subjective issue. Judge the work that is being done, who is doing it, and whether or not there are fractures within the group over issues of project focus, or personal conflicts, etc. Don't treat these divisions as necessarily bad—they can be just the excuse needed to divide up and federate.

### 4. Leadership: Delegates, Spokespersons and Initiators

Leadership can be a tricky subject to address, and not just for those who don't consider themselves "anti-authoritarians". The lack of structure—that renders decisions opaque and those that carry them out un-accountable—are structures that will most likely alienate and isolate people.

- Be honest about who are the leadership types, and the roles that they have committed to fill.
- Find ways to address tendencies of certain people to take on all the work (or those that are the ones who usually initiate work).
- If working with other collectives in a network or federation, delegate coordination responsibilities, and rotate these roles monthly, yearly, or whatever.
- Develop transparent means of communication, like "report backs", on a regular basis, about what's being done in the name of the collective.
- Share responsibilities by sharing skills with others in the collective.
- Develop transparent decision making processes that prioritize the voices of womyn.
- If you find yourself being a more active member of the collective, or initiating projects frequently, this may mean that you are a "leader" (by the loosest definition of the term). Follow the Zapatista spirit of *mandar obedeciendo*, ("leading by obeying"), by carrying out all collective

and Communist tanks in the rear (for example a division of tanks under the command of the Communist general Lister was used to destroy most of the Aragon collectives). Anarchism as a method of organising society faced the test of history and passed with flying colours.

(Originally published in Workers Solidarity No33, 1990)

### DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS OF AFFINITY

*"Today the spirit drowns in a mass of chance encounters. We are looking for those who are still alive enough to support each other beyond this, those fleeing Normal Life."*

-Against Sleep and Nightmare

We live in a society in which most of our encounters have already been defined in terms of predetermined roles and relationships in which we have no say. A randomness devoid of surprise surrounds the scheduled torment of work with a "free time" lacking in joy, wonder or any real freedom to act on one's own terms, a "free time" not so very different from the job from which it is supposed to be a respite. Exploitation permeates the whole of existence as each of our interactions is channeled into a form of relating that has already been determined in terms of the needs of the ruling order, in order to guarantee the continued reproduction of a society in which a few control the conditions of everyone's existence and so own all of our lives.

So the revolt against our exploitation is not essentially a political or even an economic struggle, but a struggle against the totality of our current existence (and so against politics and economy), against the daily activities and interactions imposed on us by the economy, the state and all the institutions and apparatus of domination and control that make up this civilization. Such a struggle cannot be carried out by any means. It requires a method of acting in and encountering the world in which new relations, those of free individuals who refuse to be exploited and dominated and equally refuse to dominate or exploit, manifest here and now. In other words, our struggle must be the immediate reappropriation of our lives, in conflict with the present society.

Starting from this basis, the refusal of formality and the development of relations of affinity cannot be seen in merely tactical or strategic terms. Rather, they are reflections in practice of what we are fighting for if we are, indeed, fighting to take back our lives, to reappropriate the capacity to determine the conditions of our own existence... the capacity for self-organization.

The development of relationships of affinity is specifically the development of a deep knowledge of one another in a complex manner, a profound understanding of each other's ideas, dreams, desires, passions, aspirations, capacities, conceptions of the struggle and of life. It is, indeed a discovery of what is shared in common, but more significantly it is a discovery of differences, of what is unique to each individual, because it is at the point of difference that one can truly discover the projects one can carry out with another.



Even allowing for this, however, as Leval points out there was not true socialisation in many cases "but a worker's Neo-Capitalism". By this he meant that the framework of capitalism was maintained with workers running factories, selling goods and sharing the profits.

## CNT

His loyalty to the CNT prevents him from pointing the finger here. Their refusal to drive the revolution through to it's logical conclusion, abolishing capitalism and refusing to share power with the bourgeois in government must be singled out as the decisive reason why industry wasn't entirely self-managed. The CNT's syndicalism left them uninterested in politics and political power. They left the parliament and state structure intact which gave the bourgeois a base from which to rebuild. They should have destroyed the government's political power entirely and used the arms and gold reserves seized to further the revolution.

## BARCELONA

All things considered, the achievements in industrial collectivisation were still amazing and surprised foreign observers like George Orwell. 3000 enterprises in Barcelona were collectivised. A council was elected by an assembly of all the workers to run each workplace. Each section elected to delegates to liaise with the council on day to day matters. The council sent recallable representatives to a council for each industry which drew up general plans for that industry.

All the major services were greatly improved. Equal wages were paid to all grades and the general wage level was increased for most workers.

For example all the small electricity generators in private hands were linked together and new dams and generators built to give a more efficient system. The water supply which had been erratic was improved with supply going up to 150,000 cubic metres fairly quickly (Leval explains, however that it couldn't be increased much further as most existing natural catchments were been used and, presumably, there wasn't time to build reservoirs).

Perhaps the most dramatic improvement was on the trams, the major method of transport in Barcelona. Five days after the fascists were beaten off the streets the trams were running under workers' control. The fleet had been increased from 600 to 700 by the repair of 100 trams previously discarded as un-fixable. A new safety and signal system was built. Track and roadway repaired and improved, an automatic breakdown warning system installed and many lines re-routed. Passengers carried increase from 183,543,516 to 233,557,506 at a standard class cheap fare. Tell that to anyone who maintains workers are too ignorant to run things themselves!

The Spanish revolution proved conclusively, if only briefly, that given a chance workers and peasants can run things themselves a lot better than the bosses. The elimination of the profit motive and the undistorted application of technology improved life greatly for those involved.

Workers' self-management and the agricultural collectives didn't collapse due to some flaw in human nature. They were smashed by fascist attacks from the front

decisions as if they were your own, and hold yourself accountable, in an open, humble manner, to the collective, if something goes wrong.

For more on leadership: <http://www.anarcho-nyc.net/organizers/organizers9.html>

## 5. What exactly shall you do?

What particular tasks and projects you take on is of course conditioned on the very reason you formed a collective in the first place, but not always. Sometimes collectives form out of no particular reason, and must come to a decision about what it is the collective would like to accomplish.

- Discuss and list the differing skills each member has. Are there skills that are complimentary? Are people interested in sharing these skills? Hold a *skill share*.
- Voice your desires unhindered by constraints. What would you ideally like to accomplish? What are your dream goals?
- Plan out the work required to execute the project, beginning from the ultimate goal, and working backwards. Assign tasks based on skills and abilities.
- Give yourself plenty of time; don't rush it. Set reasonable deadlines.

## 6. Work Tasks / fighting burnout

- Be honest about what work the collective is capable of doing. Are there only two members out of 6 that actually do work? Consider this before deciding on new projects.
- Take time and use respectful prodding to get other members involved in the decisions and the efforts the collective decided to take on.
- Partner up and divide tasks within the collective.
- Hold each other accountable for work volunteered, but in respectful ways.
- Be honest with others if you feel you are doing more work than you feel you can handle. This is one of the leading causes of burn out and resentment. Don't forget to ask for help.
- Positive feedback is key, don't forget to celebrate your wins.

## 7. Funding

How are you to fund the projects your collective decides to take on?

- Membership dues. Agree on a small membership due, like \$5 for each meeting organized, or \$10 per month. Consider the incomes of the participants before deciding on an amount.
- Fundraising events, like a "battle of the bands", or a potluck, or maybe a spoken work/SLAM competition.
- Some collectives may agree to designate as membership fees a certain percentages, say \$10, of the after tax incomes of its members.



- Discuss and agree on a process for distributing the funds. Require a quorum (more than three quarters attendance at the deciding meeting, for instance) required before funds can be dispersed.
- Designate a treasurer to hold the funds. Require a monthly report on the funds and their dispersal, and require a report of fund at every meeting

## 8. Anti-oppression within.

In the greater society we live in and under, oppressions are everywhere and the anarchist collective is NO DIFFERENT. Just because you are vocally against sexism, for instance, doesn't mean that there is no sexism evident in your collective. Anti-oppression work is an ongoing struggle. You never get over it. Find ways in which your collective can deal with ongoing sexist, racist, and other oppressive tendencies, without creating an environment that punishes" or shames those who do bad things, but instead helps them work through their errors and....

- Are the important roles always going to men?
- Do the womyn feel that the meetings are a safe space for them to speak their mind?
- Are trans people feeling threatened with certain languages like "man, that's queer"?
- Are the topics you discuss, or projects you focus on, almost always proposed by the men? Do the womyn end up doing the work?

For more info on fighting oppression, see Colors of Resistance:  
<http://colours.mahost.org/>

## 9. Dealing with disruptive individuals

This can be the most pressing and critical issue for many collectives. Disruption can be from police or *provocateurs* of course, but will usually come from individuals with inflated egos, bad socializations, or one sided ideas about what the collective should be doing. Collectives are defined by their ability to facilitate the inner egalitarian participation of all its members, and if there is a disruptive individual within it, the collective may seem to deny this ground rule.

- Utilize "principles of unity" or ground rules to keep the collective on task.
- Have someone give the collective a facilitation training. In which everyone learns to properly moderate or chair the meetings.
- Organize anti-sexism trainings (for the men, of course) on a regular basis. Encourage, but don't mandate, all male members to attend. Very often male supremacy is the reason for the disruptive dynamics at play.
- Rotate facilitation meeting by meeting.
- Give the disruptive individual the time to explain their concerns. Set aside a time that people can discuss and address these concerns.
- If the disrupter fails to listen to reason, or obviously (to the majority of the members) fails to address their own tendencies, ask the person to take time out and seek mediation.
- In a last case scenario, the collective may have to ask the person to leave the collective. Aid this person in organizing another collective, or

been a 50% increase in cultivated land and centralisation of tailor's shops brought a 66% increase in production.

These are just a few examples where the landlord system had held back the efficient use of land while peasants and labours had faced starvation every year.

At the February meeting of the cantonal federations measures were been taken to set aside areas of land for research into better seed production in each canton. It had been suggested, for example, that virus free potatoes could be raised in the mountains of upper Aragon. These type of innovations could never have been dreamed up by the landlords who relied entirely on cheap labour (without "wasting" money on machines) to keep them well heeled while the majority starved.

The Federation was also attempting to promote exchanges between collectives with richer ones distributing food and machinery to those in less well off areas. The collectives also supplied the major cities voluntarily (unlike the case in the Russian civil war(1921) where forced grain seizures by the Bolsheviks killed off any fellow feeling between rural and urban workers). They also sent spare supplies to columns at the front.

## INDIVIDUALISTS

The conference also took an interesting attitude towards 'individualist' farmers which contrasted with Stalin's murderous forced collectivisation in the 1930s. The individualists were left to their own devices though the collectives were under no obligation to give them any aid (in practice most did). However they were totally forbidden from employing workers and they lost automatic inheritance rights. Many individualists did eventually go over to the collectives and they were usually won over by example and not forced.

Aragon is only one of the regions covered. In some other areas there was almost a fully communist system in operation. For example in the Naval collective in Huesca a system operated where you just went to the collective store and took what you needed. Contributions and withdrawals were recorded and all was reduced to simple accounting.

In most areas this just wasn't possible and rationing was the order of the day. However the achievements are still impressive given the miserable state of Spanish agriculture in the first place.

## INDUSTRIAL COLLECTIVES

The CNT was a mainly urban anarcho-syndicalist union drawing much of its support from workers in Barcelona and Madrid. For this reason it may seem surprising that industrial collectivisation did not go as far as that on the land. However it must be remembered that many of these industries depended almost totally on countries outside Spain for both markets and raw materials. These were almost immediately cutoff by the European governments on the grounds of "non-interference" in Spain's internal affairs. Also most factories had to rettool for the war effort which made huge demands on labour time.



only 34,000 members of the CNT in Aragon, Navarre and Rioja all areas where most of the land was collectivised.

The military columns of the CNT moved immediately to the front and mostly took no further part in the collectives. As Leval puts it, they "lived on the fringes of the task of social transformation being carried out". Some far sighted militants such as Durutti realising their importance sent some members back to the collectives. But these were skilled organisers not armed troops.

Finally in all the collectivised areas there were many "individualists" who were allowed to hang on to their land. Far from been harassed to join they were often allowed to avail of the many free services of the collectives. Though their numbers declined with time in many cases they remained a significant minority. This couldn't have happened if collectivisation was forced.

## ARAGON

Let's take a closer look at one region- Leval's first example: Aragon. An estimated 69.5 % of Aragon's 430,000 inhabitants in the revolutionary zone took part in collectives in total, with up to 400 collectives established. When Leval arrived in February 1937 there were 275 collective villages with 141,430 families organised into 24 cantonal federations holding their first conference in Caspe. Obviously over the seven months since the Fascist coup in July this was a major achievement.

He visited the main collectives of seven of these federations. Collectivisation occurred in a similar way in most of them. After the major landowners had fled the land an assembly was held. It was decided to seize all land and machinery hold it in common. Teams were formed to various jobs, each electing recallable delegates to a village assembly.

## A BETTER LIFE FOR ALL

To distribute the common stock of goods rationing or a family wage was brought in. Given the low level of Spanish agriculture and the demands of the war it wasn't possible to jump immediately to communist distribution (i.e. free goods for all) in Aragon (or most other areas). However there was a major increase in living standards along with a greater say for everyone and a huge range of free social services.

In the village of Graus, for example, the family (which persisted as the main social form) wage meant a 15% increase in money going into households. All services such as electricity and gas were free as well as free and hugely improved medical, educational and entertainment facilities. Overall this meant an increase in living standards of 50-100%.

There were many increases in productivity and efficiency. In several areas huge new projects were made possible by collectivisation. In Esplug there were four new pigeries producing hundreds of animals and the sheep herd increased from 600 to 2,000. In Mas de Las Mantas a huge collective bakery handled all the baking previously the exclusive task of women in the home. In Alcorisa there had

see if they are able to join another collectives that has similar politics or ideas as their own.

## 10. More with dealing with inter-personal conflicts

During the process of building your collective, and along the path of actually doing collective work, you may find yourself in personal, sometimes hurtful conflict with other members. Social relations under capitalism demand competition and adversity among people, and these relations are far from absent in most collectives. Warm, generous, and respectful inter-personal relationships are key to the efficient and practical functioning of a collective. Its important to maintain a positive energy.

Inter-personal conflicts will be lessened if one focuses on anti-oppression techniques on a regular basis (as briefly described above). Struggle is the name of the game; struggle against racism, sexism, classism, "more revolutionary than thou" ism, etc, etc. Personality "issues"-ego conflicts, and on the extreme end, vying for power, can contribute to the hostile environment and ultimately break up a collective

More on developing relationships within collectives here:  
[http://www.geocities.com/kk\\_abacus/vb/wd12fw.html](http://www.geocities.com/kk_abacus/vb/wd12fw.html)

## 11. Naming your collective

Finally, this is one of the most crucial, and hair splitting tasks your collective can be faced with. The name of the collective can sometimes lead to vociferous and collective dividing arguments. Be careful. Be veeerry careful :-)

## V. WORKING WITH OTHER COLLECTIVES

If your collective decides it wants to do work with another collective, then offer to form an alliance or network. If three or more collectives decide to work together, you have a federation (if you decide to call it that)!

- Come up with alliance, federation, or network *principles of unity*, so that your collective ensures it's autonomy, for instance, but not at the sake of the desire to work with others.
- Create clear lines of communication, like a listserve or "phone tree", open to all in the federation.
- Choose "spokes" or delegates to the federation or network that can communicate and deliberate (but not make decisions) in the name of the collective, but be held accountable for whatever they say or commit to.
- Plan a conference of all the members of collectives involved in the alliance or network. Propose common projects, principles of unity or cohesion, and structures.
- Contact existing federations or networks in your area and find out what their *cohesion principles* are (what they require from other collectives in order to join).



## COLLECTIVES IN THE SPANISH REVOLUTION

by Des McCarron

From: [http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/spain/ws\\_collective.html](http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/spain/ws_collective.html)

*Many people would agree that the anarchist principle "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs" is a nice idea. A self managed society with everyone having a real say in how things were run is a lovely ideal. They might nod along to the lyrics of "Imagine" by John Lennon but then equally shake their heads and tell you that such a thing could never work "in the real world". You would probably be told that people are just naturally greedy and self-centred and such a thing would end in chaos.*

However throughout the history of the 20th century ordinary working people have succeeded in taking things into their own hands and making a go of it. Nowhere, however, has come closer to a fully self-managed anarchist society than large areas of "republican" Spain during the Spanish Civil War.

Here, for a short space of a few years, both on the land and in the factories workers and peasants demonstrated that far from chaos anarchism was an efficient, desirable and realisable method of running society.

This account of the enormous social revolution in Spain is mainly taken from Gaston Leval's "Collectives in the Spanish Civil War". Leval was a French anarchist exiled for resisting the World War I draft who spent many years in exile in Spain and Latin America.

He returned in 1936 just in time to document the revolution in economic and social organisation as it occurred. Rather than take off for the front he saw the importance of these changes and attempted to make a record of some sort for the future.

The extent of collectivisation on the land was unprecedented. Estimates of the numbers in collectives range as high as 5-7 million directly or indirectly involved (from Leval himself). Certainly millions took part to some degree from periods of weeks to as long as three years as fortunes fluctuated in the war. At the height of collectivisation there were 400 collectives in Aragon, 700 in the Levant and 300 in Castile. Of course many just refuse to believe that so many people (whether landless or with fairly large holdings) would voluntarily collectivise.

### FORCED COLLECTIVISATION?

One accusation which is repeated by almost all historians of the Spanish civil war is that the columns of the anarcho-syndicalist CNT union enforced collectivisation at the point of a gun. Ironically enough this was first put about by no less an authority the Spanish Communist Party but it is still accepted as gospel by the majority of historians of the civil war.

Of course this doesn't stand up to even a glance at the facts. The CNT was a mainly industrial union based in Barcelona and Madrid. In many areas such as Castile and Aragon their numbers were extremely low. For example there were



collectives. In the former, problems are dealt with from the top down, usually allowing no influence from the actual party or parties concerned. Meanwhile, collectives provide an environment in which individuals can work on their own problems, personal or interpersonal, without fear of reprimand.

Most collectives fall apart. You may be surprised to see a proponent of collectivism write that. But, in fact, the temporary nature of collectives is also one of their beauties. Collectives serve a purpose. If they either achieve their objectives or fall apart, they need to be willing to accept that the collective no longer serves a purpose and is a useless and wasteful organization. Collectives do not seek profit, monetary or otherwise, so there is no reason to force them to exist when their use-value has run out. For whatever reason that your collective ceases to serve its intended purposes, it needs to be realized that the time has come to move on to other endeavors. Where you have failed, try again. Where you have succeeded, try to repeat that success another way. In either case, the imperfect "science" of collectivism can learn much.

### Revolutionary Collectivism

The roots of oppression are in how our society is organized. What society actually does, and what effects those actions have, are only symptoms. Therefore, in order to radically change the way our society functions, we need to objectively change the way it is organized. This means creating alternative organizational forms while tearing down those that predominate now. In the process, we need to subjectively change ourselves, purging characteristics we have internalized from society at large and acquiring new ones from alternative institutions. The collective, then, is the ultimate form of organization for revolutionary social change.

We need space in which we can self-actualize. Collectives provide this as well as the social power required to change conditions outside the collective. Collectivism is a developing school of revolutionary thought which places the individual in the spotlight and works from that focus to change society from the ground out.

Once you form or join a well-operating collective, you begin to realize the power of collectivism. Besides facilitating self-empowering and preserving autonomy, the collective becomes a living, functioning example of the ideal alternative to life as it is lived in most of the society around us. The collective renews our hope in ourselves as people, and in people generally. Most importantly, by taking control of circumstance, the collective makes the revolution through direct action.

## WHAT IS A COLLECTIVE?

by Brian Dominic

Imagine a business where everyone is a boss, a laborer, a secretary, a janitor. Imagine a family where the children are involved in determining everything from their own bedtimes to where this year's vacation will be. Imagine a grassroots activist organization in which all the activists play a substantial role in organizing: not just as warm bodies to hold mass-produced signs and shout rhetorical slogans at demonstrations, but as actual organizers. Imagine a school in which everyone is a student, a teacher and an administrator.

Not only are these types of social organization possible, they actually exist, to a limited extent, in today's society. They are limited not by the inherent nature of their structure, or even by circumstance, but by our own (un)willingness to create and employ them. For many, their purpose is to actually change circumstance!

When a group of people comes face to face to organize in their own interest, and not in the purported interest of others, and to take actions which do not impose upon others, they are acting collectively. A collective is a social organization in which all actors are on even ground, in which all participate equitably, and in which all members are seen as vital elements of group unity and successful function. A collective is a more or less organic unit. It is not a collection of individuals who see their own interests as more important than those of the other members. Collectives serve their members by including them all. When you are a member of a well-functioning collective, you know that your interests are the interests of the collective. It is not something which is outside of you; it is an entity of which you are an integral and valued part. Your collective is yours. Collective members are autonomous managers. They run their own lives.

Collective organizations can be used to serve a plethora of purposes, but I will categorize collective institutions into 4 basic categories. Each type of collective, in adapting to its circumstances, will choose to organize in a manner slightly different from those serving other purposes. But, due to the individualized nature of collective groups, even those within a certain category will be organized differently than others of their kind-by definition, there is no standard.

The first type of collective I'll mention is the alternative institution (AI). These are groups whose purpose is to provide alternative social space or services. Examples might be everything from an independent homeless shelter to a "free school." These are anarchic spaces where or by which people can experience a significant degree of autonomy and freedom to grow and develop themselves with the help of resources around them. The primary purpose of the AI is to create and maintain gaps in society which are relatively free from oppressive forces, within which individuals can develop themselves free from authority and coercion. All collectives, as a foundation, need to be AIs, though many have other purposes as well.

Next we have counter-institutions, or XIs. These are activist groups which exist to oppose oppression. Everything from protest groups to direct action collectives fall under the category of counter-institutions. Still, most XIs are not collectives, but rather are run hierarchically. Every such group, from the community "coalition" to



the national liberation army sees its role in overwhelmingly objective terms, not recognizing that the subjective development of the activists themselves is as important as acting for external change. For those who want more out of revolution than objective change, the collective is a much more fulfilling choice of XI structure.

A third form of organization which can be collectively structured is the economic institution. Whenever a group is focused on the production and/or provision of material goods, it is economic in nature. Economic collectives are very difficult to operate simply because the nature of the mass market contradicts them at every turn. We deal with national and world economies which are strictly authoritarian and hierarchical, and there is no easy escape from them. So economic pressures which are very manipulative and entirely real often play havoc on how an economic collective-especially one with radical social principles-can function. Nevertheless, there are countless examples of successfully functioning economic collectives wherein workers are paid equitably (based on effort, not seniority or quantitative contribution) and given full participation in the decisions that affect them. In a nonmarket, socialist economy, collectives would be the ideal units of small scale economic organization, with democratic workers' and consumers' councils playing the role that market determinants carry out today.

Finally, we need to look at living institutions, such as families, homes, and even entire communities. All of these common organizations can be formatted and run collectively. Looking at the American nuclear family unit, we see a perfect example of how authoritarian organization has been adopted by the institutions in which we spend most of our leisure time. When we come home from work at a traditional business or school, we don't actually leave oppressive structures behind. There they are awaiting us in our own household. But the principles of autonomy, solidarity and participation can be applied to our living situations, be they a communal household or an intentional housing community, just as they can be applied to other kinds of institutions. The living institution is essentially an AI in which we are more fully emersed, because it is our most basic social arrangement, the one in which we actually live. By ignoring what we come home to, be it after work or school or play or activism, we overlook a huge part of our lives which affects us in ways we often don't realize.

Since collectives are focused, at least in part, toward fostering the subjective development of their members, they need to be focused on those members. This means all members need to be somewhat familiar with each other. Depending on the nature of the group, members should at least have some understanding of who they are working with, and there should be a degree of affinity. This doesn't mean that every member needs to be best friends with every other, but it does mean the collective should be small enough so that everyone can have the opportunity to get to know everyone else.

Collectives are also limited in size by the need for full participation by every member. During meetings, for instance, every voice should be heard, and everyone should be able to look everyone else in the eye. Without this kind of dynamic, the personal focus of the collective will be lost. In order to maintain diversity as well as cohesion, most collectives tend to be between 3 and 15 members in size, though there are certainly many examples of exceptions.

You might expect this places severe limits on what a collective can objectively-or externally-accomplish with such a small active membership. But that doesn't need to be the case. Collectives are not isolated units. They can either federate with other like-minded collectives, when they so desire, to work on objective tasks; or they can network with other collectives in order to communicate and provide mutual aid. In neither case do the principles of collectivity become perverted. It is still the case that the individual's interests are primary and the collective's secondary. When a relationship with another collective becomes intrusive to these ends the relationship can be severed and others sought. Federations are an effective force for changing society while networks are an excellent way for collectives to enrich their potential by sharing with others.

### Collective Operation

In order to preserve the autonomy of each member, collectives operate via special, indeed customized, processes. While collectives' internal functions vary from group to group, certain principles are consistent throughout.

For starters, some form of participatory decision-making is employed. Most collectives prefer consensus process, which requires acceptance by all members for ratification of decisions. Consensus values autonomy by ensuring that no majority can impose its will on any member. Again, this process restricts the size of a collective, and in most cases it demands that members' "political" perspectives be largely consistent, though never identical.

Especially with economic collectives, where decisions are also affected by factors such as finances, markets and material reality, other democratic forms of decision making may be necessary. But in any case, collective process must actually encourage the full participation of every member, offer each power to the degree a given decision affects her or him, and value (not just respect) dissent as a part of the collective's development.

This kind of relationship being anathema to the norms of our society, it's far easier presented in theory than operated in practice. Largely because of the baggage we bring with us when we enter a collective relationship, the day to day functions of the group are often hindered by essentially authoritarian notions. Collectives which work well, whatever their *raison d'être*, spend a great deal of time dealing with the interpersonal issues and dynamics of and between members. Any collectivist who tells you her or his collective doesn't have internal problems is lying, just the same as is any corporatist who makes such a claim.

But unlike authoritarian organizations, which fear internal "corruption" or "disorder," the well-organized collective actually welcomes it. That's because unrest is an expression of imperfection. Every collective is imperfect, but it only has the opportunity to deal with imperfections if it is aware of them. While the hierarchical organization seeks to suppress or extinguish "insubordination" (read: "expressions of individuality") in its ranks as "efficiently" as possible, the collective engages its own crisis management function: a system of exposing the problem and getting it into the open so that it can be dealt with rationally. Any internal problem which is not either buried or worked out will form a cancer which will eventually devour the group as a whole. Crisis management is where we actually see one of the clearest differences between hierarchies and